DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 438 CE 081 757

TITLE	Phare Special Preparatory Programme for the European Social Fund: A Composite Report on the National, Supplementary and Local Seminars.
INSTITUTION	European Training Foundation, Turin (Italy).
SPONS AGENCY	Commission of the European Communities, Brussels (Belgium). Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs.
PUB DATE	2000-10-00
NOTE	44p.; Third in a series of reports produced under the Phare Special Preparatory Programme for the European Social Fund (SPP/ESF). For an earlier report, see ED 437 508.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.etf.eu.int/etfweb.nsf/pages/vetdown/$file/SPP3.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Change Strategies; Curriculum Development; Delivery Systems; Educational Change; Educational Cooperation; *Educational Needs; Educational Policy; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; Information Dissemination; International Cooperation; *International Educational Exchange; Labor Force Development; National Programs; *Needs Assessment; Policy Formation; Postsecondary Education; Program Descriptions; Program Implementation; Secondary Education; *Seminars; Strategic Planning; Technical Assistance; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Europe; *European Social Fund

ABSTRACT

This document reports on phases 2 and 3 of the Phare Special Preparatory Programme for the European Social Fund (SPP-ESF), which involved national, supplementary, and local seminars to assess the following countries' needs for assistance from the ESF: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, and Slovenia. Sections 1-4 contain a brief overview of the Phare SPP-ESF program and the purposes and key activities of the various seminars. Section 5 reports on the national training institutes, which continued to consolidate their position as promoters of training for the ESF through the following activities: contributing to development of a policy framework for ESF preparations; developing a National Training Plan designed to meet the training needs of the public administration for ESF; developing curricula; and disseminating information on the ESF. The remaining half of the report presents an overview of the main findings arising from the national and local seminars, which concerned the following issues: strategic considerations; the institutional framework of vocational education; the means to effect change; and the place of human resources development. Approximately 70% of this document is devoted to reports on the national and supplementary seminars held in the 10 project countries. (MN)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 452 438

Phare

Special Preparatory Programme for the European Social Fund

A Composite Report on the National, Supplementary and Local Seminars

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Austen
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

European Training Foundation

CE 081 151

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

European Training Foundation

Villa Gualino, Viale Settimio Severo, 65, I-10133 Torino
Tel: (39) 011 630 22 22 / Fax: (39) 011 630 22 00 / email: info@etf.eu.int
Web: http://www.etf.eu.int

The European Training Foundation is an agency of the European Union which works in the field of vocational education and training in Central and Eastern Europe, the New Independent States, Mongolia and the Mediterranean partner countries and territories. The Foundation also provides technical assistance to the European Commission for the Tempus Programme.

Phare

Special Preparatory Programme for the European Social Fund

A Composite Report on the National, Supplementary and Local Seminars

European Training Foundation

Table of Contents

Foreword v

1. **Introduction** 1

2. **Background** 1

3. **Phase 2: The National and Supplementary Seminars** 2

4. **Phase 3: Local Seminars and additional events** 3

5. **The National Training Institutes** 5

OVERVIEW OF MAIN FINDINGS ARISING FROM NATIONAL AND LOCAL SEMINARS 7

1. **Strategic considerations** 7

2. **Institutional framework** 8

3. **The means to effect change** 10

4. **The place of human resources development** 11

5. **Conclusions and recommendations** 11

Main conclusions of national and local seminars 13

- Bulgaria 13
- Czech Republic 16
- Estonia 19
- Hungary 22
- Latvia 24
- Lithuania 26
- Poland 29
- Romania 32
- Slovak Republic 34
- Slovenia 36

Foreword

This report is the third in a series of reports produced under the Phare Special Preparatory Programme for the European Social Fund (SPP/ESF), which is managed by the European Training Foundation on behalf of the European Commission.

The European Training Foundation would like to thank the European Commission, particularly DG Employment and Social Affairs officials, the EU delegation representatives, the national and regional authorities in the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as EU and local experts, for their contribution to the success of the national, supplementary and local seminars that took place during the second and third phases of the Phare SPP-ESF programme.

October 2000

1. Introduction

This report aims to inform readers about the activities performed during phase 2 (national seminars) and phase 3 (supplementary and local seminars) of the Phare SPP-ESF programme. It contains:

- a brief outline of the aims of the national, supplementary and local seminars;
- an overview of the main findings arising from the seminars and additional events;
- a brief presentation of the National Training Institutes (NTIs)
- recommendations for the candidate countries' future ESF preparations;
- country by country summaries of the outcomes of the seminars in annex; and [1]
- a complete list of the seminars held in each country with relevant details.

2. Background

According to the terms of reference of the Phare SPP-ESF programme, which the European Training Foundation began implementing in 1998 at the request of the European Commission, phase 2 national seminars were intended to result in the production of ESF-type project proposals by the participating candidate countries as a basis for their ESF programming after the year 2000. This objective could not be achieved due to the lack of preparedness of the candidate countries to apply ESF-type methodologies and also because of time constraints. Consequently, the European Training Foundation and DG Employment and Social Affairs decided to re-orient the content and the objectives of the national seminars to better match the actual situation and needs as far as ESF preparation in the candidate countries is concerned.

1 Information on the introductory phase (introductory seminars) and phase 1 (study visits) is available in Phare SPP-ESF Composite reports 1 and 2 (available from the European Training Foundation)

3. Phase 2: The National and Supplementary Seminars

The Foundation organised one ***Supplementary Seminar*** for approximately 30 to 40 key officials in each candidate country, with a view to providing in-depth, technical information on the policy framework to the European Social Fund as well as the practical and technical aspects of ESF planning and implementation. European Commission officials, including from the EU delegations, were invited to make presentations on EU policy aspects whilst experts from different Member States shared their experience of managing the ESF in their countries.

The supplementary seminars were followed by a ***National Seminar*** in each country for approximately 100 participants. Whereas the supplementary seminars were intended mainly for officials at national level involved in ESF preparations, the national seminars aimed to reach a wider audience, including key actors from the public and private sector such as employers and training institutions and providers, as well as the social partners at national and regional level.

The National Seminars performed several functions. Firstly, they provided participants with essential information on such questions as:

- the policy framework of the Structural Funds, including the EU employment strategy
- the frame of reference of the ESF (supported by examples of Member States' experiences in managing the programme);
- the results of the ESF study visits and previous SPP conferences; and
- the likely impact of ESF introduction in the candidate countries.

Secondly, the national seminars were pivotal in opening up for the first time a *dialogue* between the different stakeholders on the main challenges linked to their ESF preparations resulting in a real exchange of views on the main challenges and identification of key issues to be taken forward. The seminars also allowed the national authorities to present and explain their reform proposals in the context of accession. In that sense there was a very active participation on the part of the countries themselves and a real inter-action between the participants. The richness of the learning experience of the seminars (national and local) should not be under-estimated.

Generally speaking, there was broad representation at the national seminars from among the main actors concerned with the preparations for the ESF at regional and national level (the social partners, representatives from the regional and local government as well as the national authorities).

4. Phase 3: Local Seminars and additional events

For the last phase the candidate countries designated two or three targeted regions (priority regions identified as part of the countries' preparations for Phare 2000 activities) to benefit from tailor-made 'Local Seminars' on the ESF with EU expert support. The seminars covered a number of key areas:

- information on the ESF and on the European Employment Strategy,
- examples of how human resource development project proposals are integrated into the context of the *regional planning* process of ESF Objective 1 regions;
- ESF institutional building;
- how programmes are implemented in EU Member States;
- examples of good practice in ESF projects (provided by EU experts);
- the links and differences between the current context of Phare 2000 programming and the nature of the European Social Fund operations.

As with the national and supplementary seminars, the local seminars signalled the beginning of a dialogue on major questions linked to ESF and, in particular, on the challenges for labour market and training policy.

Participants at the local seminars included representatives from the regional administration (Regional Development Agencies, regional labour offices, prefectures, etc.), the local authorities, NGOs, training institutions and social partners. The degree of participation varied from one region to another. EU delegation officials in the country and DG Employment and Social Affairs officials were actively involved in the discussion of the agendas and also made presentations. Experts from EU Member States also contributed as speakers and took an active part in workshops.

Some countries organised additional events to cover specific needs of key actors considered to be essential for ESF preparations for example:

Additional local seminars

Several additional seminars were held (in Bulgaria, Estonia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia) for key players to build up their capacity to develop ESF-type proposals for Phare funding and disseminate ESF policy and promote development of local networks.

Training activities

A simulation game organised in Latvia involved simulating the structure of ESF procedures in order to familiarise the administration with ESF rules and to allow comparison between national organisation and management structures and their EU equivalent. At the same time it allowed economic and social partners to be brought into programme planning and implementation. In Romania, a one-week training course was held for representatives from employment offices and regional development agencies on regional development and on how to design ESF-type projects. In the Slovak Republic a training workshop on "Implications and consequences to national and regional administrations" was held for 80 participants from several ministries.

Phare programming preparations

In Lithuania additional support was provided for the three priority regions for Phare ESC support to finalise the human resources development components of the regional projects.

Study visits

Following the success of the study visits in EU Member States during Phase 1 of the programme, several countries (Latvia, Slovenia) organised additional study visits to gain a detailed understanding of the programming and administration of ESF.

European Training Foundation tailor-made project

A direct outcome of the Phare SPP-ESF programme in Poland was the establishment of a project by the Foundation to provide tailor-made support for the development and implementation of ESF-type actions in five regions (Lublin, Podkarpacie, Podlasie, Warmia-Mazury and Silesia).

5. The National Training Institutes

In parallel to the national and local seminars, the National Training Institutes[2] (NTIs) continued to consolidate their position as promoters of training for ESF through a range of activities financed under the Phare SPP-ESF programme. These included:

- contributing to the development of a policy framework for ESF preparations;
- developing a National Training Plan designed to meet the training needs of the public administration for ESF;
- development of curricula; and,
- dissemination of information on the ESF.

The NTIs were involved in most of the local seminars. Moreover, through a wide range of training activities they were able to develop their role by forming a dynamic and active network across the candidate countries, which resulted in a joint Leonardo proposal for EU funding and the creation of a web site to exchange information and experience. The NTI network also led to co-operation with several international networks (EU ESF information officers, Job Rotation, Open and Distance Learning centres, etc.). Throughout phases two and three the NTIs continued their work on developing a range of training tools and actions in the following areas with a view to preparing the countries for ESF.

Development of training strategies at national and regional level

Development of an *integrated* plan which presents the training needs of the candidate countries' administrations for ESF. In addition provision of training support for regular needs analysis as well as for the monitoring and up-dating of national and regional training plans.

Development of training capacities to deliver ESF

Develop a wide range of curricula, including programmes for training of trainers, training methodologies and training for target groups, especially adult learners. Testing the delivery of distance learning training with the Open and Distance Learning Centres (developed under Phare), particularly for the administrators who will have to implement the programmes at regional level.

Information delivery

Combining training for ESF officials with up-dated information on-line via Internet as well as services to support information exchange and production of training materials using a variety of media. Dissemination of the guide on the ESF for future Member States' in local languages.

2 The NTIs were created within existing organisations in each country with the endorsement of the national authorities with a view to becoming training centres for civil servants and potential project promoters on Structural Funds, mainly ESF.

Networking

Building up networking activities at national level to rationalise the training capacities in the country and encouraging officials responsible for implementing future ESF programmes to foster regular contacts with all stakeholders, including potential project promoters/partners. Strengthening of the international networking initiated under the SPP-ESF programme in order to exchange good practice, tools and pedagogical approaches.

OVERVIEW OF MAIN FINDINGS ARISING FROM NATIONAL AND LOCAL SEMINARS

The views expressed below are based on European Training Foundation staff's own analysis of the seminars as well as on reports of EU experts who attended them.

1. *Strategic considerations*

The process of preparing for access to the ESF is already underway in all of the candidate countries. The national and supplementary seminars clearly demonstrated that the national authorities have already started thinking about the implications of ESF and its impact on economic and social policies. At national level there is a fairly high degree of awareness among government officials about ESF principles. However, the local seminars reflected a different pattern in the regions with many of the participants being confronted for the first time with information on the workings of the ESF and the policy background underpinning it. Feedback from evaluation questionnaires completed at the end of the seminars indicated the appreciation of participants for the seminars but also a clear demand for further such events and for more in-depth information on the Structural Funds and how they function in the Member States.

Integration - a new concept

The importance that governments in the candidate countries attach to preparing for ESF is not in doubt and was clear from the high-level attendance at the national seminars. However, the challenge that EU membership and access to ESF will pose for policies and planning of the candidate countries is not yet fully understood. The complexities of ESF are such that they require a new vision on the part of planners in the candidate countries. ESF entails an *integrated approach* to planning at all administrative levels because it crosses the education, employment and training divides. At the level of national government it means a shift from compartmentalisation to integration in terms of defining and implementing of policy. In other words it requires governments to have an overall vision which combines the different sectoral responsibilities of ministries. The same principle applies for the regional/local level. Training, education and labour market policies all have to be integrated into an overall plan for regional and economic development. Given that planning for ESF is prepared and co-ordinated at national level but implemented in part by local and regional authorities, it follows that regional and national plans have to be *coherent*.

The benefits of an *integrated planning discipline* that ESF imposes on governments and regions were underlined by EU experts on many occasions during the seminars. Candidate country delegates were encouraged to see the ESF framework not as another administrative burden but as an opportunity for promoting systemic change thereby achieving greater impact. This message needs to be reinforced.

The seminars showed that the concept of an integrated economic and social vision was almost entirely new to the countries. Although EU experts were able to illustrate the economic and social benefits that regions in the Member States have derived from integrated planning, the authorities in the candidate countries have not fully taken on board this step change in their planning. Bearing in mind the very compartmentalised organisation of government departments in Central and Eastern European countries, and the vertical nature of the administration, the task for the candidate countries is daunting. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the notion of *regional policy* in itself is new to the countries. The sectoral or vertical approach to government has been reinforced in Central and Eastern Europe over the last ten years through the involvement of the countries in the Phare programme with projects/programmes funded by Phare being organised largely along sectoral lines and implemented at national level by sectoral ministries.

ESF brings radical new concepts

The shift from a Phare to a Structural Funds approach also requires getting to grips with radical new principles such as *concentration, additionality* and *co-financing*. The identification of own funding sources to match the ESF subvention from the EU will be a major concern in the countries. There is a clear need for guidance on what is acceptable within the rules and for information on how the Member States have tackled the issue so that the candidate countries can make informed choices. The level of difficulty that SF/ESF principles pose and the extent of the change required should not be under-estimated.

2. *Institutional framework*

Some of the countries (Czech Republic, Poland) have already designated overall responsibility for co-ordinating Structural Funds policy to a particular ministry (usually ministry of finance/economy) and within that responsibility for the ESF to one of the other sectoral ministries. Other candidate countries, at the time the national and local seminars were held, still had not decided which ministry should have overall responsibility for ESF. This has led to competition between ministries in some countries – clearly an undesirable situation. The issue of who takes the lead is a pressing one that has to be addressed before serious preparation for ESF can begin.

Regionalisation

Even where countries had decided on the framework at national level, this still needed to be translated to the regional level. Regionalisation and decentralisation of state powers in many cases are new dimensions for the candidate countries. This has led to the creation of new ministries (Czech Republic, Poland) or agencies for regional development, for example, Slovenia adopted legislation on balanced regional development and created the National Agency for Regional Development. Candidate countries are already putting in place *regional administrations*, which in due course will be required to take on new responsibilities for Structural Funds, including ESF. New regional development agencies have been set up in Hungary and are in the process of being set up in the Czech Republic. In Poland 49 small voyoidships have been replaced by 16 larger ones to facilitate more dynamic regional development. This rationalisation has been accompanied by decentralisation of a number of functions to regional and local levels. However, in most cases the roles and responsibilities of the new regional and local administrative structures are still being defined.

Regionalisation seems to have doubtful application in the smaller countries where historically and culturally the concept of region does not exist. The critical mass needed to make regions function effectively tends to be missing. The concept of regionalisation will have to be applied flexibly to the smaller countries in order to avoid fragmentation and duplication of resources.

Regionalisation means a shift in the balance and distribution of power and responsibilities between the state and the regions. All of the candidate countries are at the beginning of the process of change and are having to cope simultaneously with new administrative tasks, planning responsibilities and new ways of working collectively involving a wide range of partners. In the future they will be faced with setting up regional structures and mechanisms for managing and implementing ESF.

Co-ordination and Communication

The process of preparing for ESF needs to be carefully managed and co-ordinated and requires a clear division of responsibilities between the different actors at national, regional and local levels. In some of the countries the roles of the different ministries at national level still have to be clarified. *Co-ordination and communication* will be essential tools in facilitating the preparation process. The integrated approach that effective ESF implementation requires will mean that the different ministries with a stake in ESF will have to re-assess their roles and how they relate to each other. In particular, the link between the ministries of employment or labour, economic affairs and education will need to be examined and managed carefully to ensure coherency and, hopefully, minimise the tensions that can arise from "competing" ministries. There is also a need to overcome the narrow, sectoral approach in favour of a more integrated, holistic approach to economic development.

The need for co-ordination and communication is equally true for the relationship between the national authorities and those at regional and local level and the horizontal links between the different stakeholders at regional level. Regional representatives at the seminars frequently complained of a lack of consultation by the government in the preparation of the National Development Plans. Although the national authorities can in mitigation point to the tight deadline set by the Commission for submitting the plans, there is nevertheless an underlying need to improve the vertical communication in the countries and thus ensure coherence between national and regional development plans. Moreover, at the regional level there appeared to be many useful and interesting initiatives underway with respect to regional economic development, but often the activities were uncoordinated and the human resources component not fully integrated into these wider initiatives. The need for mechanisms at regional level to pull together the different actions in the training and labour market fields was stressed during the seminars in order to maximise resources and avoid unnecessary duplication.

Partnership

One of the ways to achieve greater impact and ensure that all stakeholders' interests are taken into account is to work in partnership. Considerable emphasis was put on the issue of partnership throughout the seminars and on the need to apply the principle of partnership to virtually all aspects of ESF preparations. Partnerships between the national and the regional, between the regional actors, and between the regional and local players need to be strengthened in most of the countries. It is a major issue for the regional authorities where all the stakeholders need to be brought into the design, planning and implementation stages of ESF-type projects and for HRD strategic planning. It will be particularly important to include voluntary and community organisations in partnership arrangements since they are closest to marginalised groups and, therefore, better placed to represent their interests.

The role of the *social partners* in the planning of vocational training and employment policies also needs developing in the countries. Trades unions' involvement in training is still relatively undeveloped in many of the candidate countries. Similarly, the involvement of the *private sector* in the design of

education and training policy is still largely absent. This was implicit in the criticisms expressed in some seminars about whether current training provision/proposals reflected what employers actually want. Consultation of employers should be a key element in any labour market reform policy.

The picture with regard to partnership is not uniform.

Empowerment

Success in using ESF for maximum impact depends on regional and local partners and on their creativity and commitment. An important spur to empowering local and regional authorities to take ownership of projects is to show them the potential for regeneration and growth that the ESF offers. Development of training activities including case studies of success stories can give the local partners in the candidate countries inspiration to find creative solutions to their problems.

3. *The means to effect change*

Institution and Capacity building

ESF will require extensive reform of the civil service. At the national level the administration needs to be trained and equipped so as to plan, develop, manage and oversee and evaluate the implementation of ESF. At the same time there is a major institution-building task to be carried out at local and regional level. A recurring theme in the national and local seminars was concern about the administrative complexity of the ESF especially for regional and local administrations. Participants identified a range of competencies, which were either in short supply or missing entirely, and for which training was considered essential. These included: *financial planning, project design, contracting, project selection, reporting, monitoring and evaluation*. Apart from local and regional government administrators, *project promoters* were identified as a particular target group for training so as to enable them to produce high-quality project proposals for ESF-type funding in Phare.

Labour Market Intelligence

One means for the regions to ensure that future ESF proposals reflect actual and future needs of employers is by having in place an effective system of *local labour market intelligence*. Participants at many of the local seminars highlighted the absence of reliable and comprehensive data and the resulting difficulty for effective planning. The need to establish trends and indicators, some of which can only be identified over a period of years, is already urgent in the countries. Issues such as who carries out labour market intelligence and how to finance it deserve serious attention. On the positive side some countries carried out their own SWOT analyses on training and development needs in selected regions and presented the results at the local seminars

The Foundation is currently developing a project to take place in several countries in 2001 with the support of the National Observatories to develop such a capacity.

National Training Institutes

The NTIs have an important role to play in implementing national and regional training strategies for ESF preparation, providing a supply of up-to-date information and developing and servicing networks of relevant actors. It would be useful if the activities of the NTI could cover the whole of the Structural Funds and not just ESF in order to maximise the impact and ensure coherence in the training provided.

4. The place of human resources development

The seminars provided a platform for the discussion of fundamental issues related to the reform of vocational education and training. Discussion focussed on the role of ESF in promoting the *interface* between education and training and employment. The key goal of training systems to provide a pool of people with relevant skills and consequently, the need for curricula to continually adapt to changing occupational skill requirements and incorporate broader competencies were underlined. The *relevance* of the training provided by vocational schools was questioned on several occasions in the seminars. In some countries/regions the curriculum was perceived as being too narrow with young people entering the labour market with inappropriate training and out-dated skills.

The seminars highlighted the importance of continuing training and development in the context of lifelong learning and the adaptation to market, technological and organisational change. The focus of ESF on preventing unemployment arising, as well as curing unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, underlined the importance of developing actions to support workforce development. Developing the capacity of training providers to respond to labour market change is essential. The absence or insufficient supply of vocational guidance for young people and adults was also identified as a major gap in provision.

Perceptions about ESF and human resource development

In some of the countries/regions there is a risk of seeing ESF simply as a short-term solution to unemployment, rather than as a tool for long-term economic development. Participants at some of the regional seminars showed scepticism about the value of ESF. Some questioned whether there was any point in investing in human resources since "there are no jobs". EU experts pointed out the need to have an abundant supply of well-trained workers and a decent education and training infrastructure for when the local economy picks up.

Delegates failed to recognise the fundamental role of vocational education and training in responding effectively to labour market failure and in providing targeted support for people at risk of social exclusion. The role of training as a pro-active measure in anticipating skill changes and in preventing unemployment was not always understood in the countries. The presence of EU experts was extremely valuable in this context since they were able to provide examples of regions in Member States where education and training had contributed significantly to economic and social regeneration.

There was a clear need to accelerate the integration of human resources development with employment and /labour market policies.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The national, supplementary and local seminars marked an important milestone in the candidate countries' preparations for access to the ESF. The basic principles of the ESF were relayed to a large number of governmental and non-governmental actors currently or potentially involved in the preparations for ESF. In the case of the regions, whilst the authorities in charge of regional development were already thinking about the concept of regional planning and were at different stages in their preparations for the ESF, there had been very limited consultation among regional economic and social partners. The seminars proved to be a useful instrument in widening the dialogue on regional planning. Moreover, they provided an important platform for raising issues

about the fundamental changes needed in the education and training and employment systems in the field of human resources development.

Despite the usefulness and richness of the seminars, it was recognised that there was always going to be a limit on the amount of information and experience that could be conveyed in a one-off workshop. Participants in the seminars consistently welcomed the usefulness of practical examples from Member States' own experience of implementing ESF and were eager for more examples based on real-life case studies.

Recommendations

In order to maintain the momentum built up in phases two and three of the programme, there is a continuing need for wide-scale training and support to enable the candidate countries to fully benefit from ESF assistance upon accession. Three broad areas can be singled out for priority action:

- **Institution and capacity-building**

  This is needed at national, regional and local levels, so that appropriate structures and mechanisms are in place to plan, manage and implement ESF programmes in the future. Part and parcel of this is the definition of roles and responsibilities between the different stakeholders concerned but particularly between the different government departments and between the different layers of administration. The various stakeholders will need specific technical support to enable them to implement ESF effectively. In particular, a concerted effort will need to be made by civil servants and other actors on all levels to develop actions that will absorb a significant level of funds. Training providers/project promoters will need technical training in financial planning, project design, contracting, project selection, reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

- **Continuation of systemic reform of the education and training systems**

  It is important that the pace of systemic reforms already underway in the countries is maintained and that linkages are further strengthened between initial and continuing training systems in the context of an overall policy of promoting lifelong learning.

- **Integration of human resources development with other policies**

  Human resources development policy, as far as possible, needs to be integrated with labour market policy and, more generally, with wider economic policy

  All of this needs to be underpinned by regular communication and information. The contribution of existing structures, such as the National Observatories and the National Training Institutes along with other networks, should be exploited to the full with a view to filling the information and training deficit in the candidate countries.

European Training Foundation
October 2000

BULGARIA

National and supplementary seminars

Supplementary seminar:	30 September 1999, Sofia
National seminar:	1-2 October 1999, Sofia

The supplementary seminar represented a step forward in raising awareness among the key officials involved in ESF at national level in Bulgaria. Delegates were given practical examples of successful ESF projects in the Member States as well as being introduced to the overall principles and policy framework behind the Structural Funds. However, the event highlighted the need for considerable more *training and information for ESF officials* in Bulgaria on SF matters, in particular, on priority issues such as *concentration, programming, partnership* and *additionality*. Moreover, specific training, as well as resources, will be needed to develop the capacity of the *New Bulgarian University* to carry out its function as a training provider in ESF matters.

The national seminar gave participants from a wide range of backgrounds (regional and national) the opportunity to learn about the mechanics of ESF and parallel funding measures as well as the chance to have an exchange of views. One of the key messages of the seminar was the importance of a skilled workforce for regional economic development as well as the need for long-term investment in the vocational training system. A number of areas were identified as requiring urgent priority attention in the field of human resources:

- Apprenticeship training and improving the quality of training in general;
- The development of ESF as an instrument to combat unemployment
- Youth training including equipping young people with specific skills such as computer literacy and foreign languages
- Training for disadvantaged groups to improve their chances of finding work
- Development of modern technology and modern teaching methods, including distance education.

Both seminars marked an important first step forward in informing national and regional players about the ESF. However, this has to be followed up by an intensive programme aimed at raising awareness among all the key actors at all levels in Bulgaria about the policy framework and the implementation mechanism of the ESF. This should include as far as possible practical examples of different approaches in the Member States. At the same time development of human resources and employment policies should be accelerated in parallel so that both are seen as important planks in an integrated policy for regional development. The need for closer collaboration between the key institutions concerned (Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the National Employment Service) was also stressed.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Local seminars

Plovdiv (South Central region)	17-19 November 1999
Vratsa (North Western region)	9-10 March 2000

The local seminars took place much earlier in Bulgaria compared to other candidate countries indicating the authorities' determination to make the transition from national to regional planning as early as possible. Feedback from seminar participants demonstrated the usefulness of the seminars. However, the level of inter-institutional dialogue varied from one region to another. Discussion in the workshops led to the identification of a number of issues of common concern:

- Doubts about the efficiency of the Labour Offices due mainly to limited funding
- Lack of practical and technical know-how, for example, on the ESF application process, including the preparation of financial plans
- Insufficient devolution of authority to the regions
- Absence of a coherent job creation strategy
- Scepticism about the bottom-up approach to ESF
- Serious labour market problems in the regions such as over-qualified young people filling jobs meant for less qualified youngsters resulting in bottlenecks in the labour market. Brain-drain was also identified as an issue
- In certain regions the serious unemployment situation had generated a sense of resignation

EU experts made a number of *recommendations for future follow-up* and action:

The process of preparing ESF-type projects and approval process needs to be made more transparent. This should be promoted thorough increased communication horizontally and vertically, at national and regional level. More fora are needed to foster a broader debate. Administration of Phare also needs to be as simple and transparent as possible.

The information flow from the centre needs to improve. The regional development offices might play a useful role in ensuring regional players receive regular information

Clarity in the overall operation of the system should be assured with regard to institutional and procedural issues in order to improve confidence in the system and also for reasons of efficiency. Roles and responsibilities of the different actors in relation to selection and implementation of projects should be clarified as well as the institutional arrangements linking the different levels of responsibility.

The organisational capacities and the individual competencies of project promoters need to building up to deliver ESF-type projects. Training is needed in project management, monitoring and evaluation and project reporting.

A more strategic approach should be taken in relation to regional economic development to avoid ESF being developed as a job creation instrument in isolation. A parallel approach is recommended in which human resource development and employment policies are developed alongside one another as part of an integrated plan for economic development.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Greater devolution of decision-making is needed in order to ensure a real participatory approach and to create a sense of ownership and openness.

An additional training event was held in Bistritsa subsequently in June 2000 for around 70 people who had attended the local seminars. The aim of the seminar was to build capacity at regional and municipal levels for developing ESF-type measures for Phare support.

CZECH REPUBLIC

National and supplementary seminars

Supplementary seminar:	6-7 October 1999, Prague
National seminar:	8 October 1999 Prague

The supplementary seminar aimed to inform Czech officials involved in ESF-type activities about the policy framework to the ESF and about practical experience in different Member States with regard to planning and implementation of ESF. The major challenges facing the Czech Republic with regard to employment policy were identified. A particular concern was how to reduce *long-term unemployment* and to protect *marginalised groups* in the labour market. Concerning vocational training, the need to improve the system and its response to labour market requirements was recognised. An appropriate framework still had to be adopted. Related issues needing to be addressed included developing a *continuing training system within a perspective of life-long learning*, and *financing of training*.

With regard to ESF preparations, a number of areas were highlighted as requiring particular attention:

- *training for officials* and *institution building* (pilot work in the Ostrava region could be built on for this purpose)
- *preventive approaches in order to avoid unemployment*
- the development of indicators and targets for monitoring individual actions
- *the partnership approach to programme planning involving all relevant actors (including NGOs)*

The national seminar aimed to reach a wider audience with participation of the social partners, representatives from the regional and local government as well as the national authorities. Both the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport outlined the policy initiatives taken by the government in their respective fields to prepare the ground for accession to the EU. There was general agreement about the importance of education and training, the need to better link training to the labour market, the growing importance of information and communication technologies as well as the need for flexibility in the system. A law establishing a regional administrative structure had been adopted. However, there were obstacles to be overcome such as resistance to regional operational planning. The role of the social partners in regional planning was recognised as deserving attention. At national level improved co-ordination is needed between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other sectoral ministries, especially the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

Local seminars

Doubice (North West Bohemia)	29-30 May 2000
Roznov pod Radhostem (Ostrave Region)	31 May – 1 June 2000
Stare Splavy	22-23 June 2000

Representatives from national, regional and local government attended as well as employer (chambers of commerce) and Labour Office representatives. Key concerns raised by participants at Doubice and Roznov pod Radhostem included:

- The scope of actors involved in the programming process,
- The role of local stakeholders in the programming process,
- The role of social partners,
- Co-funding and administration of funds,
- Absorption capacity,
- Elaboration of National Action Plans for Employment,
- Decision-making mechanisms, project management and monitoring.

The seminars proved to be an excellent opportunity for regional/local stakeholders to develop a better understanding of the context in which ESF operates and to learn from the experience of different EU Member States about ESF programming, management and implementation. They also provided a useful forum for discussion among the Czech participants as an initial step to regional/local project preparation and to learn about initiatives taken at national level in the development of policies and programmes as well as about the establishment of basic implementation structures for human resources development measures. Participants' awareness was raised regarding the need:

- to strengthen partnerships at local and regional levels,
- to develop a dialogue culture among various stakeholders,
- to develop further the existing potential of training provision and employment services in the region,
- to improve responsiveness of existing structures to local/regional needs.

Speakers pointed out the need for *follow-up action*, starting from the establishment of regional/local priority setting on an informed basis, and going on to include project design, implementation mechanisms and administration of financial flows.

The Stare Splavy seminar was organised by the National Training Fund and looked at the experience of Austria in implementing and managing the ESF. Participants also focussed on the future role of the Labour Offices in the context of ESF and the importance of active employment measures. Both were considered to have a major role to play in the implementation of the ESF. Questions were raised in particular about the regional structure and how it should be organised as well as the division of responsibilities between the different levels. A number of *training needs* were identified as follows:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- How to obtain information on EU funding
- Project development design, and management
- Study visits to employment offices in Member States
- Monitoring and controlling of finance
- Auditing and accounting; and
- Language skills.

A special concern was the capacity of the Labour Offices to handle the flow of funds, which was likely to quadruple. This would entail adapting existing structures, staff training, new procedures and provision of appropriate equipment.

ESTONIA

National and supplementary seminars

Supplementary seminar:	**17-19 November, Tallinn**
National seminar:	**19 November, Tallinn**

Delegates at the *supplementary seminar* were informed first-hand by the European Commission about the European Employment Strategy, the policy framework behind ESF and its main features as well as about ESF experience in three Member States (Ireland, UK and Finland). In addition the main conclusions of the study visits to Germany and Portugal were presented. Three key issues were identified for Estonia as a result of the study visits:

- Administrative capacity-building including training in project development and management skills for officials at national and regional level
- Co-financing
- Project development and management skills at national and regional level.

The ensuing discussions gave rise to a number of issues needing to be addressed in the context of Estonia's ESF preparations:

- Regional reform within Estonia needs to be completed
- The need for a regional input to government policy on ESF given that delivery will take place at regional level
- The need for an informed debate at a high-level on the choice of the ministry (Ministry of Education or Social Affairs Ministry) to have overall co-ordination responsibility for the ESF and an early decision so that the responsible authority can start to disseminate relevant information and key messages to administrators, delivery bodies, regional agencies and the general public
- Co-ordination and co-operation between ministries needs to improve and especially between the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education

National government officials at the seminars demonstrated sound knowledge of Structural Funds issues. However, EU experts identified a real need for further consultation and training in order to analyse the following principles in-depth with regard to the implementation of the Structural Funds:

- *concentration*: what priorities should be chosen in the field of regional development and ESF in Estonia;
- *programming*: how to build in these priorities in the Development Plan and in the future Objective 1 programme plan;
- *partnership*: how to improve the level of partnership between all relevant actors and to encourage all partners to be actively involved;
- *additionality*: how to organise the division of financing, what priorities will be funded under Phare, ISPA, SAPARD and the Structural Funds. With regard to education and training, the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

funding under Socrates and Leonardo should be co-ordinated with other projects planned under the Structural Funds. An integrated framework is advisable for planning and co-ordinating these programmes.

- *co-ordination within the Structural Funds* is vital too. In order to maximise funding and avoid duplication it would be advisable to link ESF and ERDF funding with each other.

By analysing the above principles a plan can be built up for implementing human resources development in the field of education and training that is consistent with regional economic development goals. A prerequisite for success will be a *comprehensive training programme for civil servants* at national and regional level. This should include study visits to EU Member States. An ESF information unit would also be useful to provide information on current EU sources of funding and actual projects.

A key conclusion from the seminars is that Estonia needs to accelerate work on its human resource development and employment polices in parallel so that ESF provision in Estonia can contribute to the wider objective of regional competitiveness and economic development. At the same time decisions are urgently awaited with regard to the proposed reform of the local administrative structures before work can really start on putting in place institutional arrangements at regional level for managing the ESF.

Local seminars

Puhajarve Puhkekodu (South East Estonia)	8-9 May 2000
Narva-Joesuu (North East Estonia)	11-12 May 2000

National government representatives explained the link between the National Development Plan and the Employment Action Plan. At both seminars the county representatives and the Pre-Accession Adviser complained of lack of consultation by the government on the National Development Plan. However, the subsequent discussions proved constructive in identifying the main issues to be addressed in the regional development plans.

The contribution of *human resources* to regional development was only partially addressed in the seminars and was identified by EU experts as an area for further clarification and development. In particular, the role of the education and training institutions, especially the vocational education centres and the universities need to be reviewed. A number of issues linked to training and the labour market were identified as ripe for reform, particularly the vocational schools, which came in for criticism for their inflexibility and their failure to respond to the needs of the local labour market. Skills mismatch was seen as an obstacle to the regeneration of the regions, both of which were characterised by high unemployment and falling populations. Closer co-operation between training providers and enterprises was called for. Lack of co-ordination among local actors was also mentioned as well as overlapping of provision and training providers operating in isolation. Key areas that need to be worked on are:

- early and sustained contact between the counties to agree on common interests and to avoid duplication of effort and resources

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- on-going contact between the national administration and the local participants on the development of ESF.

The structural difficulties involved in preparing for ESF should not be under-estimated. The existing county structure in Estonia does not fit easily into the regional pattern that the Commission wishes to see for the implementation of the Structural Funds. Given the centralised approach to date on ESF preparations, more attention needs to be paid to consultation of local stakeholders and to involving them in discussions on regionalisation.

HUNGARY

National and supplementary seminars

Supplementary seminars:	27 – 28 October 1999, Budapest
National seminars:	29 October 1999, Budapest

Policy and planning

The discussion demonstrated the Hungarian Government's clear commitment to preparing for the Structural Funds. Ministry representatives demonstrated a good grasp of the issues and a readiness to move forward. However, discussions highlighted the need for a common *policy framework* with clear objectives for the use of the Structural Funds as a reference point for sectoral planning. In particular, the European Commission highlighted that the policy framework for a national European Social Fund programme needed to be consistent with the objectives of the *Employment Guidelines* of the European Union and be reflected in a *National Action Plan for Employment*.

ESF supported active labour market and employment policy objectives focussing on preventing unemployment arising in the first place (for example, through anticipating skill shortages) and curing unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment. The importance of prioritising and target setting was also underlined as well as the need for an integrated approach to planning at national and regional level. Key issues include tackling low female participation in the labour market, co-funding, the legal framework and the links between education and the labour market.

Organisational framework

The role of the different ministries in the implementation of ESF was identified as an issue for clarification. *Inter-ministerial co-operation* needed to be further improved. It was suggested that one ministry should take the lead in order to drive the process of preparing for the European Social Fund (subsequently it was agreed that the Ministry of Economic Affairs would co-ordinate ESF). *Partnership*, involving all relevant actors at all levels, was considered to be essential.

Implementation and follow-up

Areas for follow-up included building the capacity of the public administration (at both national and regional level) to manage the ESF bidding and selection cycle and monitoring and evaluation. In addition it was stressed that there was a need to develop the capacity of institutions to implement ESF projects. It was noted that Regional Development Agencies were recently established and their role in managing the Structural Funds had yet to be clarified.

Local seminars

Debrecen (Great North Plain)	6-7 March 2000
Miscolc (North East Hungary)	9-10 March 2000
Szeged (South Plain)	15 April 2000

Understanding and response to the changing situation is not uniform at regional level. Differences in the development of structures and representations between the different regions were reflected in the varying degree of ownership of the planning process. In some seminars the number of delegates was small, which constrained debate and limited the dissemination of information and experience. To some extent this has been subsequently rectified by Tempus Public Foundation, which has produced a compendium based on the presentations and the conclusions of the workshops and distributed it to relevant organisations.

Although a considerable amount of activity is already underway in the context of promoting regional economic development and regeneration, much of the activity in the regions appears to be uncoordinated. The need for improved *co-ordination at all levels (horizontal and vertical)* and an *integrated approach to regional development* is *generally* lacking in the regions. In particular, *human resources strategies* need to be integrated into regional development plans. The importance of human resource development as a contributor to regional economic development was not fully appreciated. The structure of the regional development plan and the human resource component need to be strengthened and aligned gradually with that of the Structural Funds approach. Moreover, the regional HRD strategy should be informed by comprehensive economic and labour market analysis.

Whilst labour market analysis is already underway in the regions, this work needs to be intensified and human resource development trends incorporated into economic and social data. Related issues, which need addressing, were co-ordination and funding of labour market analysis activity. In some cases, where trends needed to be established over a number of years, this work needs to begin urgently. Availability of reliable and comprehensive data was an issue in all three regions.

Partnership involving all the stakeholders was highlighted as an essential factor. Vocational education and training organisations, and voluntary and community organisations all need to be brought into the design, planning and implementation of HRD actions. There was some concern about the extent of the social partners' involvement in the process of developing plans. The Debrecen and Miscolc seminars highlighted a particular need in those regions for regional mechanisms – networks or umbrella organisations – to act on behalf of the different organisational sectors. More generally, equal opportunities, and particularly the low participation of women in the labour market, remain to be tackled.

The importance of *communication* both between national and regional level and amongst the different partners in the region was underlined at all of the seminars. The seminars were successful in raising awareness of EU employment policy and the frame of reference of the ESF. Emphasis was given to programming, management and evaluation considerations. Work should now begin on capacity building in the regions in preparation for implementing the European Social Fund.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LATVIA

National and supplementary seminars

National seminar:	20 October 1999, Riga
Supplementary seminar:	21 October 1999, Riga

The national and supplementary seminars were well attended with representation from all the key organisations likely to play a key role in ESF implementation in Latvia. Some key questions were raised by EU experts that need to be addressed in the preparations for the implementation of ESF in Latvia:

- Which is the best institutional model for managing ESF. The Ministry of Welfare will be responsible for ESF implementation in Latvia. However, the future role of ministry agencies is still uncertain
- Flexibility of programme documentation
- How to define innovation in vocational training
- How to choose relevant project selection criteria
- Identification of co-financing sources – it was noted that a National Fund had been established in Latvia to cover co-financing contributions. The question was raised as to whether unemployment benefit could be counted as co-financing.
- How to define the necessary competencies of ESF administrators in Latvia. Knowledge of the vocational education and training system was considered to be an important criterion
- How to develop a computerised system for managing ESF. The need to plan ahead early because of the long lead-in time was pointed out. Delegates agreed that *study visits* would be useful to follow up this issue. It was recognised that the candidate countries could not simply transplant systems from the Member States. System design and maintenance had to be done according to Latvia's needs.
- How to become more customer-oriented in ESF management. The Ministry of Education emphasised the role of the National Observatory in supporting the ESF preparation process. The national and supplementary seminars were well received on the whole. However, delegates identified a number of areas where they wished to see further information and/or debate:
- The National Development Plan and, more generally, Latvia's preparations for ESF
- Latvia's pre-accession process
- More detailed information on the ESF implementation, including further examples of EU Member State's experience with implementation.

Local seminars

Jurmala (Zemgale and Kurzemz regions were represented)	6 April 2000
Rezekne (covering the Latgale and Vidzeme regions)	7 April 2000

The seminars took place in Jurmala (Zemgale and Kurzemz regions were represented) and in Rezekne (covering the Latgale and Vidzemz regions). As well as being introduced to the policy framework underpinning the Structural Funds and practical examples of the working of the ESF in selected Member States, delegates were able to learn at first hand about the processes involved in planning for Phare support for economic and social cohesion in Latvia. Ministry of Education and Welfare representatives also presented their plans and ideas for Phare support and the National Employment Plan. EU experts stressed the importance of empowering local communities in ensuring successful ESF planning and implementation. Delegates were interested in learning of Member States' experience in tackling a number of aspects related to ESF preparations. In addition, some specific concerns were expressed by the participants:

- How to build capacity of project promoters in order to prepare relevant funding proposals
- The need to capitalise on surplus capacity of under-utilised vocational schools to train unemployed people
- The urgency of up-dating vocational training curricula to meet labour market requirements in order to avoid having to re-train young graduates immediately
- The failure to involve the regions to a greater degree in the preparation of the National Development Plans and related Regional Development Plans
- The need to delegate more functions to the Regional Development Agencies.

NB: A follow-up seminar on ESF project simulation was held on 1-3 August 2000 in Vidrizi (Latvia) for a range of key players with potential involvement in Structural Funds/ESF, including the social partners.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LITHUANIA

National and supplementary seminars

National seminars:	2 December 1999
Supplementary seminars:	3 December 1999

The seminars provided a useful platform for informing key actors concerned with ESF preparations about the wider policy background at EU and national level, including Lithuania's plans and on-going reforms with respect to labour market and training issues. Participants had the opportunity to exchange ideas and concerns about the underlying issues and thus increase their overall understanding about the challenges facing Lithuania with respect to its future access to the ESF. A number of concerns were identified during the seminars and gave rise for discussion:

- The failure of the draft regulation identifying roles and responsibilities for ESF preparation at government level. In particular, decisions were needed on the respective roles of the Ministries of Education, Social Security and Labour, and Public Administration.
- Co-financing – what it entails and how co-funded activities could be delivered on the ground. There was concern that the institutional arrangements were not adequate.
- How to develop a partnership approach
- How to put the White Paper on VET into practice and promote co-operation between Ministries competing for Structural Funds in order to avoid competition
- The need for institution building at regional (county) level especially in order to take forward and support the government's reforms on a practical level
- How to make training providers, particularly the labour market training centres more employer-oriented
- The lack of involvement of local partners in the programming process and the weak organisation of the social partners in terms of contributing to policy on education and training

The resulting discussions led to recommendations on key priorities for action:

- Institution building and preparation of administrative structures to ensure capacity to absorb Structural Funds
- The need for an integrated approach to education and training policies and for coherency with employment and labour market policies. This should be achieved through improved co-operation among the Ministries concerned
- The putting in place of mechanisms for gathering labour market information in order to identify the real needs of the labour market
- To build ESF preparatory measures into the National Development Plan
- To use existing structures as far as possible for ESF implementation.

Local seminars

Juodkrante (Klaipeda, Taurage, Telsiai, and Siauliai counties)	18-19 May 2000
Druskininkai (Marijampole, Altyus, Kauna, and Vilnius counties)	22-23 June 2000
Ignalina (Utena and Panevezys counties)	26-27 June 2000

On the whole, there was balanced representation from the different partners, although the Klaipeda Region was not adequately represented. Discussion on Phare regional HRD projects at the Juodrante seminar revealed inconsistencies between regional and national government representatives leading to the conclusion that communication between the different ministries with the regional partners had not always been effective. Moreover, it became clear that the rationale for the regional HRD projects did not stem from a comprehensive analysis of regional/local economic and labour market needs. A number of issues were identified at Juodrante:

- need for capacity building at regional level
- need for a good communications strategy and mechanisms
- need to build on existing good relations between partners to develop horizontal and vertical partnerships for delivery of complex actions
- regional/local HRD planning needs to be informed by high quality local/regional economic and labour market analysis
- need for an integrated approach embracing top-down and bottom-up involvement based on local strategies developed by local partners in response to local needs.

A detailed discussion took place at the Druskinkai seminar on the programming and preparation process for the Phare Human Resource Development Fund project in Marijampole. The experience of the first year of programming of the project provided useful pointers and lessons for those involved in preparing ESF-type projects. A key conclusion of the seminar was that there is a considerable need for further information and training in social and economic cohesion issues. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of the planning process leading from National Development Plans to Regional Development Plans and to project fiches.

The Ignalina seminar also demonstrated positive experience of the first year of programming for Phare Economic and Social Cohesion with strong involvement and interest among regional economic and social partners. However, existing structures were not yet sustainable.

The overall conclusions/recommendations can be drawn from the three seminars as follows:

- There is an information and participation deficit on ESF that needs to be filled
- A clear definition of key partners' responsibilities is needed at national and regional level
- Partnership needs to be built up at all levels and between the different levels through the development of fora and other mechanisms to allow systematic communication and decision-making

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Scepticism about the importance of investing in human resources development needs to be countered by explaining the need for parallel strategies for employment and human resources
- There is a need to explain the benefits of the planning discipline of the ESF so as to encourage the authorities to take a more strategic approach to planning
- Over time Lithuania needs to build up its capacity to draft a full multi-annual National Development Plan covering expenditure on all national priorities and not just co-funded priorities
- Proper administrative and support systems need to be put in place for ensuring sound and efficient management of ESF, including effective information technology packages.

POLAND

National and supplementary seminars

National seminars:	21-22 October 1999, Warsaw
Supplementary seminars:	21-22 October 1999, Warsaw

There was broad representation from among the main actors concerned with the preparations in Poland for the ESF at regional and national level. This allowed for a real dialogue between the key players and particularly between the national and regional representatives. This was a promising start to a nation-wide debate on ESF preparations.

The meeting introduced participants to EU employment policy and the frame of reference for the European Social Fund. The Polish National Employment and Human Resources Development strategy was presented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Discussions focussed on potential ESF support for Poland with reference to two specific policy areas: *active measures to counteract unemployment* and *continuing training* to promote employability and mobility of the workforce in the context of lifelong learning. With regard to the discussion on active measures, delegates exchanged views on the use of the *Labour Fund* as a financial tool for developing labour market measures and as a supplementary source for ESF. A number of *gaps* were identified with regard to ESF preparation:

- Shortage of staff with knowledge of foreign languages
- Lack of technical abilities for project design
- Insufficiently developed involvement of the social partners
- Not enough information exchange on projects amongst the different actors.

Regional representatives in particular identified the establishment of mechanisms for supplementary national funds provision and the amendment of the law on public finances as important steps to be worked out in the ESF preparations. More generally, participants indicated the need for *better co-ordination* and *access to information* on Phare programmes and ESF programming at regional level. The national government representatives envisaged that the forthcoming law on regional policy would address many of the concerns expressed by regional delegates.

Concerning *continuing training* the seminar helped clarify the division of responsibilities between national and regional government. One important need is to develop the *infrastructure* for continuing training *at regional level* and more generally to have *a well-developed vocational education and training and employment system* at regional level and a good dialogue between the different actors involved in the delivery of the system.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Local seminars

Lublin (Lubelskie and Podkarpackie regions)	**7-8 February 2000**
Bialystok (Podlaskie and Warminsko-Mazurskie regions)	**10-11 February 2000**
Katowice (Slaskie region)	**14-15 February 2000**

For many of the participants it was their first opportunity to learn about the ESF. The seminars enabled them to learn how programmes were implemented in EU regions as well as raising awareness of the importance of *human resource development* in the context of *regional planning*. The links and differences between the current context of Phare 2000 programming and the nature of the European Social Fund operations were also clarified. EU-experts gave useful examples of good practice in ESF projects. They highlighted a number of areas to be addressed by the regions:

- the need for an *integrated vision* towards regional economic development (see below)
- the importance of establishing *sustainable partnerships* with all the key stakeholders for the design, implementation and evaluation of the projects
- the need to have an *inclusive human resource development strategy* which addresses the challenge of skills development at all levels and for all ages (development of life long learning systems)

A number of **key issues** arose during the seminars:

Programming: principle of added value

- using EU resources to develop, expand and target existing provision more effectively and thus achieve greater impact
- a more rigorous programming process should not be considered as a burden but as an opportunity to secure greater impact
- the close link between programming and pooling/concentration of resources and an integrated vision (integration of employment and training aspects, synergy between HRD measures and the wider economic/social priorities of a specific region, combined use of funds).

Developing a sound analytical base

The importance of *high quality analysis and data* to support the identification of regional HRD priorities and as a basis for programming was underlined. There appeared to be limited knowledge in the regions about employers' skill needs.

Flow of resources

It is unclear who will have overall responsibility for Phare resources: Voivodship or Marshall's Office. The legal status of consortia also has to be resolved (see below). The division of financial responsibilities between central, regional and sub-regional level still have to be defined.

Contracting

The implementing agency remains to be identified as do the sub-contracting arrangements.

Partnership

The roles and responsibilities of partners have to be defined as well as procedures for selection, monitoring and accounting etc. The participation of *voluntary and community organisations* as well as the *social partners* also has to be addressed. The need for widespread *consultation* on regional development plans and human resource strategies and the importance of building consensus were all stressed.

Economic development gaps such as the social economy/environmental task force etc.

NB: *a direct outcome of the Phare SPP-ESF programme was the establishment of a project by the Foundation to provide tailor-made support to Poland for the development and implementation of ESF-type actions in five regions (Lublin, Podkarpacie, Podlasie, Warmia-Mazury and Silesia).*

ROMANIA

National and supplementary seminars

Supplementary seminar:	27-28 September 1999, Bucharest
National seminar:	29 September 1999, Bucharest

There was high political coverage at the **supplementary seminar**. Among the 40 delegates were the Minister for European Integration, the President of the National Agency for Regional Development and the Secretary of State for Labour and Social Protection. Participants were given an insight into the EU Employment Strategy and the policy framework for the Structural Funds as well as being introduced to the operational aspects of the Structural Funds and the ESF. The event provided a useful platform for exchange of experience and the identification of action to be taken in the context of the ESF preparations in Romania, which was particularly important given the lack of action up to then by the Romanian authorities in practical terms.

The contents and conclusions of the supplementary seminar were presented in turn to the 150 delegates attending the national seminar. There was broad representation from all the key player involved in vocational education and training provision, including employers representatives, research institutes and NGOs at local level. The seminar was particularly useful in reaching a relatively wide audience, especially the large number of Romanian officials involved in implementing ESF-type activities at local level. The key features of the National Plan for the Development of Human Resources were outlined at the national seminar. Key outcomes of the national seminar were as follows:

- identification of the main areas requiring action with a view to aligning Romania's *employment policy* in the direction of the four pillars of the EU's employment strategy
- recognition of the usefulness of the Phare Vocational Education and Training Reform programme and the need for the results to be widely disseminated
- concern about the deepening structural problems in the Romanian labour market. The main economic factor characterising the decline was the decrease in the employment rate in the industrial sector as a result of restructuring.
- agreement was reached on a number of general policies aimed at improving the situation in the labour market.

Local seminars

Poiana Brasov (Central Region)	2-3 March 2000
Piatra Neamt (North East Region)	6-7 March 2000
Sinaia follow-up seminar	23-24 June 2000

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Whilst there was high-level political coverage for the opening of the seminars as well as satisfactory representation of the Regional Development Agencies throughout, local authorities, NGOs, social partners, etc. were not adequately represented, which restricted the impact of the seminars to some extent. Some key issues were identified as needing to be addressed with regard to the preparations for ESF in Romania:

- There is a need to develop *institutional dialogue at all levels* - national, regional and local - to improve the effectiveness of human resources development. At the same time there is a lack of *institutional co-ordination* on education and training
- A political decision is required regarding the overall responsibility for ESF and also on the distribution of responsibilities between national and regional levels
- Regional decentralisation is at a very early stage of development with the Regional Development Agencies still working out their role.
- The low level of salaries does not stimulate employment. The *Local Development Committees* need to take *a more pro-active approach* and take measures designed to anticipate company closures/mass lay-off of workers
- ESF cannot be a substitute for a regional development plan involving all actors concerned with employment and training provision. An *integrated approach* to economic development is required in which education and training are seen as tools for promoting regional regeneration. Areas that need to be addressed include environment and development of SMEs
- The absence of comprehensive *labour market analysis and data* was identified as a barrier to effective *planning*, which is badly lacking both at the macro-economic and microeconomic levels
- More needs to be done to attract foreign investors so that actions for human resources development can be linked to targeted interventions in growth areas
- Active employment measures, if they are to be effective, must be tailor-made according to individual needs and not defined "by categories". *Social partners* need to become actively involved in developing such measures, which should also include reform of the vocational education and training system. The County Social Dialogue Commissions and the Local Development Committees should meet regularly and formulate clear objectives
- The activities of the Employment Bureaux should be improved and expanded
- Greater *diversification of training provision* should take place, including in the agricultural and industrial sub-sectors
- Improvements are needed in the *legal and fiscal framework* in order to promote *SME development*
- *Information on ESF* is needed, preferably first-hand, through seminars and workshops. These would also help to improve *communication* between local and regional authorities. Specific *expertise* is lacking particularly in project design and management

NB: One practical outcome of the seminars resulted in a training course from 22-25 May 2000 in Mangalia focusing on the issue of identifying, planning and implementing ESF-type measures as well as on regional development in general. The beneficiaries were the County Offices of the National Agency for Employment and Vocational Training and the offices of the Regional Development Agencies.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

National and supplementary seminars

Supplementary seminar:	6 December 1999, Bratislava
National seminar:	7-8 December 1999, Bratislava

Participants at the national and local seminars obtained a useful overview of the state of the Slovak government's preparations for the ESF. Some major steps had been initiated such as the creation of a Ministry of Regional Development and Construction, which among its tasks would have to draft a new Act on Regional Development. However, regionalisation still remained very much a concept with Slovakian regions not yet existing as territorial administrative entities. The main elements and priorities in the National Development Plans as well as the National Plan for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire were also outlined. A number of issues were identified as requiring attention in the context of ESF preparations:

- How to identify co-funding
- The need for improved monitoring and evaluation tools
- The need for partnership in the reform of the school system
- The need for better co-operation between ministries as well as between national government and the regions in implementing the National Development Plan
- The importance eof taking forward the concept of regionalisation
- The need to put in place suitable structures at all levels to manage ESF.

Local seminars

Kosice	3-4 April 2000
Banska Bystrica	6-7 April 2000
Stara Tura	24-26 May 2000

Representation from the different actors concerned with ESF was well balanced on the whole although the social partners were absent from some of the local seminars and the involvement of the educational authorities and vocational schools was weak. On the other hand the contribution of the social partners was significant at the Stara Tura seminar. Some key messages were conveyed at the seminars:

- The importance of combining central strategic vision of objective and priorities with systematic labour market intelligence at regional and local level in order to come up with effective ideas for projects

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- The need to standardise administrative procedures
- The need for clear criteria in order to secure high-quality projects
- The need to improve the information flow between the ministries and co-operation between central and regional administrations (lack of co-ordination and partnership between key actor was identified as a serious weakness at Banska Bystrica)
- The need for better co-operation among all the partners within the National Development Plan.

EU experts identified a number of areas that need to be addressed by the Slovakian authorities:

- Further involvement of NGOs to ensure effective implementation for ESF
- Information and training of key players, including NGOs, is needed as a priority
- Lack of a coherent institutional framework for regional development represents a barrier to developing priorities, operational programmes and projects at regional level. In particular, there needs to be effective co-ordination between the Ministry for Regional Development and the regional and county authorities. Local communities need to be empowered to be able to produce development plans that are coherent with national priorities.
- Co-ordination of ESF-type actions with regional plans is a major challenge. The lack of inter-departmental co-ordination among public agencies was seen as an obstacle to properly integrated regional plans. Inter-departmental co-ordination within public administration at central and local levels needs to be reinforced with a view to having a more integrated approach as regards the contribution of *human resources development* to effective implementation of regional policies. Co-ordination is particularly important for ISPA action in the fields of environment and transport with employment and enterprise promotion policies
- There is a need to strengthen partnership practices between the different actors at regional level
- Analytical and planning capacities need to be built up to improve further the quality of development plans
- Further reform of the education and training system, which continues to equip young people with obsolete skills and a too narrow preparation, is needed
- The transition process to regionalisation needs to be co-ordinated with overall preparations for accession in order to reinforce Slovakia's capacity to absorb EU funds
- Regular monitoring and assessment needs to be put in place in order to ensure the efficiency of employment policies
- A pro-active employment policy for school leavers is required in order to reduce the high unemployment rate among school graduates

SLOVENIA

National and supplementary seminars

Supplementary seminar:	20-21 October, Ljubljana
National seminar:	22 October, Ljubljana

The objective of the supplementary seminar was to increase awareness about ESF issues and the policy framework surrounding the ESF among officials in the main government departments concerned with ESF. The national seminar was aimed at raising awareness among central, local and regional government officials and the social partners. Some key messages were conveyed during the seminars:

- The need for training and employment strategies to be closely linked
- The importance of an integrated local/regional approach in which the different institutions, interests and resources are brought together and training needs identified jointly.
- The value of having a network of key players in the development of education and training strategies
- The flexible potential offered by modularised training in response to changing training needs
- The need for more progress on the question of certification of vocational training.

A number of key issues were identified with a view to Slovenia's ESF preparations:

- Main *priorities for vocational education and training* include: systematic labour market needs analysis
  - the development of a system for assessing and certifying skills acquired outside the formal systems
  - the establishment of a system for life-long learning
- Six objectives for future ESF assistance were identified as follows:
  - reducing unemployment with priority being given to providing employment and training measures for certain target groups such as the long-term unemployed and the disabled
  - developing the SME sector, including reducing the administrative obstacles to business creation and strengthening support infrastructure
  - maintaining and raising the employment level
  - increasing the quality and the relevance of training to meet the needs of the labour market
  - institution building, including increasing the participation of the social partners in labour market policy development
  - balanced regional development involving improved co-ordination between ministries and the extension of regional partnerships

Overall Slovenia's preparations *at national level* are well advanced in terms of the legal and institutional framework. Slovenia has already introduced the basic institutional framework for the implementation of the acquis as far as regional policy and co-ordination of structural funds are concerned. Responsibility for the Structural Funds and co-ordination of structural policies rests with the Ministry of Economic Relations and Development whilst the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Funds is responsible for ESF policy. Preparatory work at regional level, on the other hand, is still in the early stages.

Local seminars

Trbovlje (Zasavska region)	20-21 March 2000
Celje (Savinjska region)	23-24 March 2000
Murska Sobota (Pomurska region)	17-18 April 2000

The seminars were successful in three respects:

- Awareness-raising among the regions on the EU Employment Strategy and the principles governing the ESF
- Regions were informed about EU 's support to Slovenia and its regions
- Participants were sensitised on crucial issues for local/regional development (bottom-up approach; partnership building; planning, implementation and evaluation mechanisms for ESF).

Participants identified a number of *key issues* for structural policies with respect to regional development:

- Difficulties to promote *employability* coupled with lack of motivation amongst the unemployed and unskilled workers with regard to training and retraining
- Concern in all the regions about *brain-drain* and *the ageing population*
- Lack of clarity about *the role of the statistical regions*, some of which appear to be too small to be planning regions. Regional stakeholders tend to focus too much on their own territory, rather than seeking solutions to certain issues on a wider, even national, basis (e.g. post-secondary education; improvement of infrastructure). Given the size of Slovenia, there are limits as to how far the concept of regionalisation can be applied. In this respect questions can be asked about the feasibility of certain regions, for example, Zasavska
- Very low participation of *trades unions* in the seminars
- The need for a clear *framework for regional development* based on *partnership* and in which roles are clearly defined (municipalities, regions and national level). The seminars demonstrated a certain lack of consultation by the Regional Development Agency of key partners at the planning stage, including priority setting
- The importance of *concentration* in structural policies.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

As far as preparation for the *Structural Funds* are concerned, awareness raising has to be followed up by *further information and training* to the stakeholders to enable them to best utilise funding possibilities and to design future programmes and projects. This will require:

- Continuous information on the framework for regional development in Slovenia
- Transparent co-operation between the national and regional/local level
- Use of inter-active, pro-active training methods
- Attention to the question of "balance of power", which will be essential in handling the principle of concentration in practical terms. Selection criteria should be set up for this purpose
- Matching resources in order to create synergies for sustainable development (horizontal and vertical).

The process of preparing for accession and the Structural Funds in Slovenia at local/regional level is now underway. However, it will be essential to involve the local/regional stakeholders actively in the development of their regions and to introduce capacity-building measures. This will require a clear division of responsibilities between the nationals, regional and local authorities as well as mechanisms to enable effective dialogue at vertical and horizontal level.